

Article

History, Kinship, Identity, and Technology: Toward Answering the Question “What Is (Family) Genealogy?”

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Abstract: The article attempts to move beyond cursory definitions to explore the fundamental core and practice of genealogy. Some genealogical writers think that it is history or a subset of history. Others view it as a study of kinship, or relations, and identity. Though technology is increasingly used as a tool to do genealogy, it is not viewed as its essence. The article moves toward an answer to the question “what is genealogy?” through four interventions directed at these four concepts. It examines history, kinship, identity, and technology in relation to genealogy. It demonstrates key differences between history and genealogy. It discusses the use of the genealogical model in anthropology, and then relates how sociology views kinship as social. Four kinds of identity are relevant to genealogy, but none answers what genealogy is. The article argues that genealogy is a technology in the ancient Greek sense. Technē is primarily a kind of practical knowledge with characteristics congruent with genealogy’s project. Genealogy is a technē in its essence rather than history, a study of kinship, or a study of identity.

Keywords: genealogy; history; identity; kinship; techne; technology

1. Introduction

The question “what is genealogy?” may be approached in many ways. This article explores one path to move toward an answer. It is based on reflection about the question and about how one might proceed from the question to an answer rather than to the answer.

Answers to the question “what is genealogy?” have been short dictionary-type definitions or classifications. Genealogy has been described as an account of descent from a person (Morgan 2015, p. 3; Hartley 1998, p. xiii; Merriam-Webster 1993; Brown 1993), ascent to a person (FamilyTree.com 2015), and both (YourFolks.com 2018). It has been called a subset of history (YourFamilyTree.org 2018), a branch of history (Greenwood 1990, p. 3; Clifford 2001, p. 1-1; BCGCertification.org 2018, epigraph), a kind of microhistory (Mills 2004, p. 2; 2003, p. 260), and (not) a handmaiden of history (Kent et al. 1973, p. 200; Devine 2001, p. 330; Hirschman and Yates 2012, p. 4). Some view it as a study of identity and relationships (Devine 1996, p. 16) or identity and kinship (Byrne 2012). It is becoming increasingly linked to technology as more people take DNA tests to connect with cousins and search for deep ancestral identity, and as a growing number of digitized documents, group discussions, and pedigree charts become accessible on the Internet. Genealogical technology is broadening with commercialized databases, improved visualization software, and expanding use of artificial intelligence. In short, genealogy has been associated with history, kinship, identity, and technology. But whereas some genealogists have equated it with (a subset of) history, and a study of kinship and of identity, they consider technology as only a tool to assist in doing genealogy.

These associations have not been explored to probe how they might enlighten as to the essence of genealogy. Genealogists prefer to do genealogy, not theorize about it. Those who are not genealogists

do not understand the practice well enough to accurately reflect on its essence. Determining what genealogy is based upon what genealogists do is complicated by the fact that a great number of those who pursue the search for their ancestors conduct their research with insufficient thoroughness, so reflecting on genealogy based upon their practices and results leads to invalid conclusions. Mere collections of names, dates, and places may distort the views of non-practitioners about the essence of genealogy. That is a reason for being aware of and acting according to the ethical and critical imperative of truth while researching and posting results. Another reason is so that it avoids misleading other researchers (Williams 2002, pp. 11, 14).

This article proposes to explore what genealogy is through four interventions relating to history, kinship, identity, and technology as it was conceived in ancient Greece. They are interventions because they challenge the brief attempts at succinctly capturing what genealogy is by examining the definitions and classifications in more depth. This article will show that contrary to some of the brief definitions offered in the past, genealogy is not a part of history, is not a study of kinship, and that although important aspects of identity are involved, it is not a study of identity. It will suggest that genealogy is a technology (in the ancient Greek sense) in which the essence underlying its practice by serious and experienced genealogists moves beyond doing and making to a kind of knowing that is based on the objects that it investigates. It is interested in truth not (just) in the sense in which it tries to discover the truth that is already there, but (also) in the sense that its theoretical knowledge enables it to bring to appearance its objects, thus displaying pragmatic knowledge in the course of performing research and writing proofs.

2. History

2.1. Three Definitions of History

The first intervention relates to history. Considering history independently of genealogy, there are three increasingly specific definitions of what history is. The first is that history is a study of the past (Jenkins 1991, p. 5). This is such a broad definition as to be almost useless because it does not help to differentiate it from other fields of study. Many fields involve study of the past, including literature, geology, psychology, and biology.

The second definition improves on the first. It is that history is a study of human actions in the past (Marrou 1966, p. 33). This definition helps to eliminate some fields such as geology. However, there are some human actions that seem too minute or of little consequence to be of interest for history, or at least to be of primary interest to historians. Blinking, tics, dreams, and yawns are actions in which historians are usually not interested, for example. That, of course, does not imply that this second definition is incorrect, only that it needs nuanced improvement.

The third definition narrows the scope. History is concerned with human actions, or activities, of the past that have societal significance or that help explain the society being studied (Carr 1961, p. 4). The addition of “societal” and “society” in this definition implies that history is not interested in individual actions unless they relate to society. Another way of stating this is that history is interested in relations of individuals to each other in society.

2.2. History of History

Ideas about history and the differentiation of past and present have themselves undergone historical development. Beginning in the Renaissance, the idea of anachronism emerged in thinking about differences between antiquity and modernity that led to the quarrel between the ancients and moderns (*la querelle des anciens et des modernes*) in the seventeenth century. This development led to a view by the eighteenth century that not only was the past prior to the present, it was different. The past represents difference (De Certeau 1988, p. 2; Koselleck 2002, p. 165; Schiffman 2011). This turn toward historical consciousness had far-reaching consequences, for example, in thinking that

everything is viewed as historically relative, including historians' interpretations of the past (Gadamer 1975, pp. 8–9).

In early Western writings, the past was not distinguished from the present (Homer), historical explanation was a simple relating of events that did not stand out in importance (Thucydides), the past was timeless (Aristotle), history was conceived as occurring in linear and episodic time with no causal or other links among events (Herodotus), and the present was viewed as existential (Augustine). In the Renaissance, differences between antiquity and modernity were noted (Petrarch), the past was thought to be necessarily viewed from the personal present (Montaigne), a distinction was drawn between past and present and among multiple pasts (Montesquieu), and a fuller realization developed about the historicity of human consciousness (Vico) (Schiffman 2011).

2.3. *The Past Is Absent*

This summarized history of history lays the groundwork for thinking about history in the last two centuries or so. No longer is it possible for those who are informed about historiography and the philosophy of history to believe that one can know the past exactly as it was. There is no absolute objectivity about the past.

The past is absent (Kleinberg 2017, p. 136). It is over, gone. It has no ontological reality because its object is dissolved (Aron 1961, p. 118). History is of events, and events occur or occurred but do not exist. There is no knowledge of the past except for and by means of human consciousness (Aron 1961, p. 34). Time is irreversible so one cannot go back and re-experience it (Aron 1961, p. 40). The old naïve view of history was based on ontological realism, that is, that events occur in space and time, are observable, and are fixed and immutable. Historical ontological realism fails to recognize the limitations of our own historical horizons, that is, that our view of the past is determined by our own personal perspective, our past, culture, etc. (Gadamer 1975, pp. 39, 49–50; Kleinberg 2017, p. 2). Vico's discovery of the historicity of our consciousness began the process of upsetting the foundation for this kind of realism. The ontological realist view of history takes our own current epistemological understanding of the past as the reality of the past (Kleinberg 2017, pp. 1–2; Gadamer 1975, pp. 39, 49–50). But a past event cannot be made present. The past has no ontological properties though there may be a latency of such in reverberations of the past, in traces, and in presences of the past (Gumbrecht 2004; Heussi 1932; Hatton 2018, pp. 2, 16).

Another way of framing a historian's historicity is to state that one cannot isolate historical facts from interpretation. The past cannot be separated from the present historian's interpretation of it (Marrou 1966, pp. 39, 238; Phillips 2013, p. 7). The past is not an account of what occurred but rather is composed of events that cannot be recovered to be experienced as they were when they transpired (Jenkins 1991, pp. 11, 19).

Although traces of/from the past exist in documents, buildings, and artefactual remnants, these traces are results, or symptoms, of what produced them (Jenkins 1991, p. 49; De Certeau 1988, p. 11). They imply events. The past may be inferred from them. Events are studied as inferences of the symptoms, and are not directly known. A trace is as such the non-presence of the past (and one could argue of the present). There are no unerasable and indelible traces of the past (Kleinberg 2017, p. 128; Derrida 1978, p. 230) that can lead to a direct grasp of it uninfluenced by one's social, cultural, technological, and historical present and recent lived past. Because the historian lives in the present and has lived in the recent past, she/he cannot give a value-neutral description of past facts (Kleinberg 2017, p. 122; Jenkins 1991, p. 12).

History is a combination of facts and interpretation that cannot be separated (Carr 1961, p. 11). Historie (factual history) and Geschichte (narrative history) are mutually determined (Koselleck 2002, p. 49; Carr 1961, p. 24; Dray 1964, p. 5). All historical representations mediate our engagement with the past (Phillips 2013, p. 7; Carr 1961, p. 5). Furthermore, a study of how history has been represented and written (about) shows that often interpretation is an exercise in power (Jenkins 1991, p. 25). Those in power (re)write history to support a (broadly conceived) political agenda.

Essentially, historical writing is a narrative (Mink 1987, p. 47; De Certeau 1988, pp. 43, 287; White 2014, pp. 5–37). Narrative makes events intelligible by telling a story that connects them (Mink 1987, p. 47). What results is explanation by exhibition rather than demonstration (Mink 1987, p. 79). Narrative is a way of thinking not just a literary device (Mink 1987, p. 176). It makes truth claims (Mink 1987, p. 198). The purpose of history is to make the past legible and intelligible (Kleinberg 2017, p. 143; Marrou 1966, p. 49; De Certeau 1988, pp. 3, 96).

2.4. History Implications

From this discussion, some essential characteristics of history as a discipline may be summarized. First, history is primarily concerned with events that have human societal significance. Second, history is written primarily as narrative. Third, history explains largely in terms of the causality of events (Carr 1961, pp. 113, 117, 135). Fourth, history is no longer understood as based on ontological realism. Historians are conscious of their own historicity, the role of interpretation, the place of imagination, and the influence on them of their present historical situation when creating narrative.

Compared to these essential characteristics of history, genealogy is not history. Genealogy is not concerned primarily with the societal significance of events. It is not written primarily as narrative. It does not explain in terms of causality. It fails to reflect on its underlying ontology, that is, its assumptions about objects, prior to undertaking its epistemological approach to the past. It assumes the validity of ontological realism.

2.5. What Genealogy Is in Comparison to History

Genealogy is concerned primarily with individuals and with facts about individuals, and mostly about vital data facts related to birth (including parents), marriage, offspring, and death. Most genealogists are unconcerned about societal significance, but when they are, it is for the purpose of better understanding an individual. Of course, genealogy is also interested in the family to which the individual belongs or is linked in some way that sheds light on the individual.

Genealogy is written primarily as a compilation of facts (or assertions about events), mostly related to vital data, but sometimes about such contextual information as migration, occupation, religion, etc., but then usually for the purpose of answering questions about vital data. Knowing an individual's religion may lead to church birth, baptism, marriage, and burial records. Knowing a migration place of origin may lead to marriage records, records of children's baptisms, and to parents. Only occasionally is genealogy written as narrative and then usually as a stringing together of discrete facts viewed as genealogically significant or as interesting stories about individuals.

Genealogy is not concerned with what caused events, with a few exceptions. Interest in material, efficient, and formal causes of birth is only for the purpose of identifying parents. Interest in cause of death is for the purpose of doing medical genealogy or as a curiosity.

Genealogy is almost always practiced assuming ontological realism. This puts it at odds with advances in historical and historiographical thinking in the last century and especially the last several decades. This reflects a lack of self-critical and theoretical thinking, both of which are required to hope to be considered an academic discipline, but even more importantly, to deepen its own roots as a discipline.

2.6. Methodology

There are specific methodologies, or techniques, used by expert genealogists that are not generally used by historians. That is because genealogists are concerned with determining identities of individuals in specific relations to a research subject or ancestor, whereas historians are concerned with events with broader societal significance. For example, genealogists may more frequently use indirect evidence to identify parents and other relatives. The objects and information sought by genealogists and historians differ. Similarly, there are specific methodologies used by expert historians not generally used by genealogists. Those are used, for example, to gather data for statistical analysis

and interpretation for the purpose of learning about events, trends, and behaviors of societies as a whole or about large segments of a society.

At a general level, expert historians and expert genealogists use the same overall methodological approach in the sense of how to learn about and understand the past. Both seek to reconstruct the past as accurately and sincerely as possible, though both of necessity view the past from and through the present. Both avoid speculation unless it is strongly suggested by good evidence, and then they reveal when they are speculating. Both seek definitive sources, ones that are trustworthy, but both also are aware of the pitfalls of relying completely on one source for drawing conclusions. Both avoid literary license and creative flights of fancy, but both form hypotheses that are testable and tested, and both ask questions for which evidence is sought to find answers. Both gather data some of which may conflict, and both work to resolve data conflicts before drawing conclusions. Both make prudent use of written, oral, and artefactual sources. Thus, both share the same concern for objectivity, truth, careful reconstruction, and coming to thoughtful conclusions. Detailed methodologies differ because of their unique interests, but are alike in their overall approach to the past.

3. Kinship

In the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, anthropology used genealogy as a model to frame the study of and to understand kinship. Lewis Henry Morgan conceptualized consanguinity as either descriptive (describing distinct relations in terms such as father, wife, brother, and daughter) or classificatory (thinking of kinfolk with those relational terms applied to people in generalized classes) (Morgan 1997, p. 12). For Morgan, kinship was biological as understood by genealogy, and was founded on sexual procreation (Feeley-Harnik 2001, p. 54). “Marriage forms the basis of relationships” (Morgan 1997, p. 10). W. H. R. Rivers also thought of kinship as bio-genealogical (Rivers 1900, pp. 74, 77). Birth defined kinship for him (Helmreich 2001, p. 134). Although David Schneider viewed a relative by “blood” (biological descent or ascent, and collaterals) as in the precinct of nature (Schneider 1980, p. 23), and a relative by marriage a matter of law (conduct code) (Schneider 1980, p. 27), both were founded on sexual procreation. Mary Bouquet also argues that kinship theory depended on the genealogical method, but writes that that reflected an ideological consciousness that centers on a male–female union (Bouquet 2001a, p. 44; 2000, p. 187). She argues that the genealogical diagram in anthropology essentializes kinship relations to lines of descent and generations (Bouquet 2001b, p. 98).

There is circularity involved in thinking of genealogy as kinship or as a study of kinship. Genealogical structure becomes synonymous with kinship nomenclature (Farber 1981, p. 41). Genealogy is used to understand kinship, and kinship is used to understand genealogy. This circularity does not help advance an understanding of genealogy. It is a restatement of the model that anthropology adopted from nineteenth-century genealogy, and is indirectly tautologous.

There are other issues with viewing genealogy as kinship. It causes one to view non-Western society through a Euro-American lens (Holmes 2009, p. 60). It thus prevents understanding other cultures on their own terms in domains of relatedness and kinship, and implicitly devalues those cultures. Commenting about Bouquet, Holmes compares human pedigrees with animal breeding, and how they were related by connecting the genealogical method and animal pedigrees (Holmes 2009, p. 61). Colonial agents and anthropologists both practiced genealogical blood-line ethnography to account for tribal order, rights, and relations. This fostered a “breeding” connotation in recording family trees (Holmes 2009, p. 63).

Later anthropologists and sociologists evolved their thinking to view kinship as social. Well-known thinkers followed this line of thought including Émile Durkheim (Durkheim 1965, pp. 252–53, 388–91), Marilyn Strathern (Strathern 1988, pp. 3, 12, 218–19, 260–64, 282, 364–65), and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (Lévy-Bruhl 1985). Durkheim showed the lack of correlation between kinship and genealogical proximity (Durkheim 1969, pp. 110–11). Marshall Sahlins argues that kinship is mutuality of being (Sahlins 2013, p. 2, 20). Nurture, not nature, makes relations, and so kinship is not

given at birth (Sahlins 2013, pp. 2, 3, 20; Viveiros de Castro 2009, p. 237). Kinship is formed through friendship, and shared interests, work, food, and suffering (Sahlins 2013, p. 9). As Sahlins concludes, “human birth is a semiotic function of a kinship order, rather than kinship a biological sequitur of birth” (Sahlins 2013, p. 87).

Thinking of kinship as genealogical/biological is itself a social view that is historically influenced (Leach 2009, p. 185; Kramer 2011a, p. 381). It is a cultural construction masking as scientific facts based on nature (Sahlins 2013, p. 4). Bouquet argues that Rivers’ biological emphasis was a social recognition of biological ties (Bouquet 2001a, p. 47). Robert McKinley wrote that “genealogical reckoning is already a way of placing a cultural construction on supposedly preexisting biological facts” (McKinley 1981, p. 386 [note 8]). Genealogy is a unique historical way of viewing the objects of its study (Cassidy 2009, p. 25). It has its own way of viewing relatedness. But as discussed, there are problems with conceiving genealogy as kinship.

Genealogy’s view of itself as a study of kinship raises an ambiguity as to whether kinship is material (based on blood) or bioinformatic (based on such data as genotype and phenotype). The material view is the Euro-American view that a substance passes down through generations (Cunningham 2009, p. 112). It understands kinship as biological relatedness (Leach 2009, p. 175). The bioinformatic view rests on conceiving genes as units of information (Cunningham 2009, p. 113). This morphs into the view that relations are formed on the basis of knowledge (Leach 2009, p. 183–84).

The view that kinship is social denies that birth establishes kinship. Even if birth were when kinship was gained, that by itself would not answer whether kinship is material (blood) or that one is born into a social class (Sahlins 2013, p. 4). Bouquet argues that the visual representation of a pedigree chart/family tree was important in the historical process of fixing birth as the beginning of kinship (Bouquet 2000, p. 186). The tree preserved the memory of ancestors, enhanced the prestige of lineage, and sustained power (Klapisch-Zuber 1991, pp. 106–7). Gísli Pálsson points out that the family tree was used by rural people to honor those in it (Pálsson 2009, p. 87).

More recently, sociology has emphasized personhood and gender (Carsten 2000, p. 1; Butler 2007; Battersby 1998). These, as well as political, religious, and other non-genealogical reasons form the basis for kinship (Helmreich 2001, p. 135). Viewing genealogy as based on sexual procreation may be a way of justifying property inheritance. But inheritance of property is more about power, prestige, and wealth than about genealogy.

Catherine Nash argues that genealogy produces rather than describes kinship (Nash 2004, p. 5; Kramer 2011a, p. 381). To geneticize kinship is an imaginative refigurement of kinship (Nash 2004, pp. 2, 25). Kinship cannot be genetically tested (Nash 2004, p. 27).

Genealogy is as much a search to understand ancestors as it is discovery of relational facts (Mason 2008, p. 30). Genealogy is expanding to be open to understand how adoption, varied and queer gender roles and relations, and non-biological relatives are important to one’s own identity. Genealogy is a discovery of affinities (Mason 2008, pp. 31–33, 36) which is social as well as biological. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro experiences Amazonian affinity as a primordial lived given (Viveiros de Castro 2009, p. 259).

Bernard Farber observed that how one understands and values kinship can be a way of sustaining personal identity (Farber 1981, p. 168). The what of ascent and descent feeds the who of identity (Marks 2001, p. 355). As mentioned, non-traditional relations and senses of belonging are important for the formation of identity. Nash observes that the linguistic geneticization of kinship and identity “slips from individual and family to wider notions of collective identity, origins and communities of descent, meeting racialized versions of difference and belonging as it does so” (Nash 2004, p. 26), a dangerous path for kinship considered solely as bio-genealogical, and one among several important reasons for genealogy to rethink itself theoretically. In this connection, some topics requiring reflection are the ethical conditions of genealogy’s practice and use, and its occasional proclivity toward historicism, ethnicization, and racialization. This provides a transition into consideration of genealogy as concerned with identity.

4. Identity

There are many ways of conceiving the meaning of identity. Identity operates in many disciplines including mathematics, economics, philosophy, biology, sociology, and psychology. Many books have been written about different senses of identity so it is far from a simple concept. Four seem most relevant to genealogy. They are the uniqueness and sameness of an individual across record sources, attainment of satisfactory self-understanding, belonging to a social group, and emotionally identifying with one's deep ancestry, or distant origins.

4.1. Sameness across Records

The first sense of identity pertinent to genealogy relates to the uniqueness of a person. Giving evidence of identity of a person across record sources is critical to genealogical proof (Hatton 2016b). Without this step, two separate people may incorrectly be thought of as one (conflation), a common error committed by assuming that two or more people with the same name are one. Also, without careful examination, reasoning, and correlation of multiple record sources, one person may be split into two perhaps because he/she lived in different locations at different times, appears in records with different name spellings, or underwent some sort of change such as of occupation that leads a searcher to invalidly conclude he/she was two distinct people.

In this use of the term, identity is sameness. An identity is a particular person different from all other persons. A person can be identified through her qualities, events in which she participated, and relations with objects or other people, but is not constituted by those (Devine 1996, p. 16; Mills 2007, p. 28; Stevenson 1989, pp. 11–28; Hatton 2016b). The goal of proving that multiple record sources refer to the same person is to discriminate and confidently describe a unique individual, an identity. The genealogist must also ensure that all evidence attributed to a person does accurately relate to that person.

Using evidence and reasoning to prove identity across multiple record sources is a critical part of the procedure of doing genealogy. But they are a matter of research process rather than its goal. Without sufficient effort and focus on identity, one cannot rely on the results of genealogical proof, but those are prerequisites to good genealogy, not the essence of it. Genealogy does not study identity—it proves it to study something else.

4.2. Personal Identity

The second sense of identity of interest to genealogy relates to personal identity. Attainment of satisfactory self-understanding pertains to a kind of psychological identity. Erik Erikson thought that identity formation and the quest for identity were among the main life tasks (Erikson 1963, pp. 235–38, 261–63). Learning one's family history helps in the quest (Erben 1991, p. 276; Owusu-Bempah 2007, pp. 23, 33; Nicolson 2017, p. 15). Without close relations, one may lose her genealogical roots or the opportunity to learn about them which can be traumatic and lead to other personality disorders (Owusu-Bempah 2007). Genealogy is important for self-understanding (Kramer 2011b). Self-development begins with knowledge and memories of ancestors, not with birth, although one is born into an ancestral milieu (Ricoeur 1966, pp. 434, 441; Oksala 2004, p. 20; Guenther 2008, pp. 101, 106; Husserl 1973, pp. 61, 200). One motive for doing genealogy is self-development, gaining identity in light of one's ancestral origin in terms of the sub-worlds inhabited by ancestors (Nicolson 2017). This kind of identity is a result of carefully practicing genealogy but it is not the subject of genealogy's study. Rather, it is something studied by psychology. Although in one sense, personal identity is a set of beliefs, desires, and attitudes that cannot (easily) be changed (Fearson 1999), becoming aware of that identity (the Socratic "know thyself") is furthered by studying ancestral origins.

4.3. Social Identity

The third meaning of identity relevant to genealogy is social identity. Belonging to a family historical group is a kind of social identity. The group can be based on social, economic, occupational, and class membership but in the family historical context refers to belonging to a clan, surname-group, or group of interrelated cousins, direct ancestors, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, etc.

This kind of identity has received a lot of attention from sociologists. Green mentions the idea of inherited traits, but also the role of family stories as a way to create dialogue between generations and thus pass on the sense of belonging to a family group (Green 2013, pp. 395, 397). When one attains identity with a social group, he/she gains a sense of belonging to the group, identifies with the group and its goals, behaviors, etc., and sometimes acts as a member of the group. The group may be an agent for action as in political, class, and gender action. This is sometimes thought of as a collective identity (Cerulo 1997). This stresses the commonality among members of the group (Hitlin 2003).

Often, genealogists do not have a thorough enough knowledge to adequately assess the social or other kind of standing of their ancestors in relation to contemporaries further back than a generation (Bottero 2012). Another impediment is that often genealogists interpret whatever their ancestors thought or did as the standard of good and right, and do not critically examine the prejudices, biases, and ethical aspects of ancestors' actions and ideas (Sleeter 2016). This sense of identity is socially produced (Lawler 2014), sometimes within a familial identity. Identity involves community and connectedness (Brubaker 2004) which can become a core aspect of selfhood. This connects personal and social identity.

This meaning of identity can be a result of doing genealogy, and may even be a purpose for doing genealogy. However, genealogy is not a study of this kind of identity. Rather, this kind of identity is a phenomenon studied by sociology.

4.4. Deep Ancestry

The fourth kind of identity of relevance to genealogy has to do with deep ancestry. This facet of identity has emerged with the popularization of DNA tests that result in reports of one's ethnic, tribal, and racial genetic makeup. The ancestral time frame measured can be hundreds or thousands of years and in many cases reaches back to a time before historical records. Because of the marketing saturation for these genetic tests, this sense of identity has, for some, become equated to genealogy. Many who submit DNA samples are interested only in deep ancestral roots. Yet for them, this is a component of their sense of identity. Nash remarks that genetics helps some people to recover a sense of identity, and in this sense deep ancestry may relate to personal identity. People identify with their ancestors (Owusu-Bempah 2007), and although deep ancestry does not identify individual ancestors, it can imaginatively help someone construct a group with which to identify, and in this sense it relates to social identity. Partly because of the prominence of genetic testing and genetic technological advancement, some understand DNA and genes as standing for who they are (Shapin 2000; Roof 2007, p. 170; Brierley 2015, pp. 4–6, 12).

This kind of identity is the result of DNA testing targeting not genealogists but those wanting to identify with deep ancestry. Genealogy is not a study of this kind of identity. Rather, geneticists study this kind of identity.

To summarize, identity is a result of, a purpose of, or an important part of the practice of genealogy. Genealogy involves a study of identity, but it is not a study of identity.

5. Technē

The fourth intervention to advance toward an answer to the question about what genealogy is involves technology as conceived in classical Greece. In some ways genealogy as practiced by many people seems similar to hobbies such as coin collecting and battle reenactments with little connection to academic disciplines. However, genealogy as practiced by more experienced researchers is a craft,

or collection of techniques, or what the classical Greeks called *technē* [τέχνη]. Careful consideration of genealogy as *technē* shows that it exhibits characteristics that if developed further, would make it a more active interdisciplinary partner in academia. Some of the more recognizable characteristics of genealogy consist of technical know-how, and practical tips and methods related to what record sources to use, where to find them, and how to use and abstract from them. They include how to find, read, and recognize information in record sources. Genealogy is concerned with how to use the information as evidence to answer questions that are suggested by the techniques, and to support conclusions. Current standards require rigorously citing sources. Good genealogy also depends on sound analysis and reasoning both of which have been under-emphasized. These are all parts of *technē*. Unfortunately to the detriment of genealogy as practiced by most, genealogy ignores theory, epistemology, ontology, and interactions with academic disciplines because these are considered by most genealogical practitioners as impractical, and not applicable to finding records, ancestors, and clients. Yet, classical *technē* has theoretical knowledge as its foundation, and genealogy would benefit from developing its theoretical foundation.

5.1. Greek Technology

Technē in Greek is often translated as “art” or “craft.” It was used in the context of handwork, in practices such as metalworking or woodcarving, but also in what today are professions, for example medicine. It was the term applied to the work of artisans and craftsmen.

Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle reflected at some length about the essence of *technē*. *Technē* is performed or practiced with an end (*telos* [τέλος]) in mind (Plato 1961a, 196e; Rosen 1968, p. 186) often producing a handmade work (for example, a piece of furniture or ceramic) or with the aim of curing a patient’s disease (medicine). In other words, *technē* is directed toward an end. This fits genealogy as its ends are discovering relatives and relations, etc.

Technē requires an assertion of will (Rosen 1968, p. 170). Genealogy proceeds when a genealogist decides and acts on a decision to research. With much experience, a craftsman may achieve mastery of a skill. But mastery is also directed toward making the material worked on subordinate to one’s wish—carving and cutting wood, melting and shaping metal, performing physical therapy or administering medicine to a patient to cure an ailment or disease. For the genealogist, it is mastering sources, information, evidence, analysis, reasoning—exerting mental and sometimes physical effort to break through so-called brick walls or to overcome hurdles to eradicate ignorance and errors to be able to solve a concrete problem.

A craftsman (and others) admires his crafted object, the fruit of his will, labor, and knowledge (Rosen 1968, p. 243), just as the genealogist (and others) may admire the process, documentation, and conclusion of research on a particular family history problem. The results-oriented nature of *technē* provides some measure of efficiency, as *technē* gives its master some control over chance. Whether *technē* is a physical handcraft or a studied application of technique, it results in an intellectual (Gadamer 2000, p. 74) and physical creation. One important aspect of *technē* is that it is not involved so much with the fabrication, production, or creation of a product, as with the knowledge of how to make an object. This is a crucial characteristic of *technē*, and the Greek use of the word *technē* requires focus on knowledge, though proof of that knowledge may be in the practice of it (“he [the artisan, in this case, a rhetorician] must watch it actually occurring”) (Plato 1961a, 271e). The masterful practice of the art is evidence that theoretical knowledge underlies *technē*. This knowledge increases over time with correspondingly greater experience. The Greeks held this kind of technical know-how, *technē*, in such high regard that it became the paradigmatic model for knowledge as such (Gadamer 2000, p. 75; 1986, p. 35).

Technē is the correct application in practice of knowledge of how to create a product of whatever kind. It structures and shapes physical material, treats bodily ailments, or in the case of genealogy, manages and analyzes evidence to solve genealogical research problems. Craftsmen have a specific knowledge related to the things with which they work. This knowledge is based on principles, grounds,

reasons, and standards. A craftsman shows his knowledge in the process of practicing it, producing the end product, healing a sick patient, finding the answer to a difficult family history question, and writing a proof argument.

Technē is teachable (Gadamer 1986, p. 46), but may be best learned as an apprentice with guidance from a master mentor. Once a craftsperson becomes a master, he/she can explain the reasons for using a certain approach and techniques for creating something, but in this case he/she calls upon theoretical knowledge related to the specific technē. The process, or practice, of production is subordinate to the end (telos), or to its utility—how it will be used—though like other creations, once the product leaves the artist/craftsman (after it is produced and is used by another/others), its use is not under the control of the artist/craftsman, and so its use may differ from what the artisan intended. That is a common characteristic of creations given by or taken from creators.

In short, technē is epistēmē [ἐπιστήμη]—knowledge—know-how, gained from teachers but mostly through experience (Gadamer 1975, p. 33). It is specific knowledge related to the material, tools, and utilitarian goal—the (intended or expected) end/telos.

5.2. Heidegger

In a well-known writing about what an artwork is, twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger, scholar of early Greek thinking, wrote about the connection of knowledge and ancient technology. Technē is a mode of knowing, not just a craft. To know, he wrote, is “to apprehend what is present . . . in the uncovering of beings.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 59) Technē “is a bringing forth of beings . . . out of concealedness and specifically into unconcealedness of their appearance.” (Heidegger 1971, p. 59) To understand Heidegger’s point, it should be noted that the Greek word for truth (alētheia [ἀλήθεια]) literally means uncovering, or unconcealing.

5.3. Discussion

Genealogy brings forth ancestors by presenting their appearance as related to someone. The ancestral role of an ancestor is brought to presence in the research and proving of the multi-parental thread linking someone to that ancestor. The nature of genealogical ancestry is created in the act of genealogical research. (This takes the epistemological stance of truth which is implicitly dependent on an ontological stance (Hatton 2016a).) Descendants and ancestors are shown to be such and genealogically proven to be such in the actual research, proof, and citations comprising a proof argument or narrative.

Truth, the uncovering, happens during the genealogical process. To put it from another angle: That process is how truth, the uncovering, happens. The uncovering, truth, is unconcealedness but also occurs in the process of unconcealing.

But what is this epistēmē, this knowing, this uncovering truth of genealogy—ancestors, descendants, siblings? This technē, this knowing, is a knowing of beings (Seiendes, not Being [Sein]), of past beings and of their relationships. This bringing forth to light, into the open, this unconcealing, is a presenting of beings, for the applicable knowing is of beings. Genealogy is a know-how of origins of self—one’s self, another’s self, and the establishment of one’s non-original origination (one’s own personal origin is his/her conception and birth, but one’s birth originates out of the lives of one’s parents, grandparents, etc., and thus is non-original) (Romano 2009; Hatton 2018). It establishes, that is, sets forth a traditional (in the sense of a real tradition) transsubjectivity that is nourished by and in a hereditary capital fund (Ricoeur 1966, p. 434). Genealogy is thus a bringing forth of the origin, the pre-condition of the origin of one’s impossible-to-experience origin, one’s birth. In this respect, genealogy helps ground the self in a transcendental birth (Henry 2003, pp. 132–34).

Heidegger also writes about technology in a 1954 publication (Heidegger 1954). There he begins by stating that technology is instrumental (Heidegger 1977, p. 5), a means to an end (Heidegger 1977, p. 4). It is an uncovering (Greek alētheia). Technology represented as means has as its core characteristic that it discloses itself as instrumentality that can be backtracked to causality. Technology, technē, is under

the jurisdiction of telos, its aim, end, or purpose. That aim is a bringing to presence of something, or a letting come forth to presence. In Greek that is poiēsis [ποίησις], the root of the English word “poetry.” Poiēsis is precisely a bringing forth of what is not yet present into presence (Plato 1961b, 205b). One kind of poiēsis is physis [φύσις], often translated “nature,” the root of the English words “physics” and “physical.” Nature, physis, is the bursting open or forth that belongs to the bringing forth, but it arises out of itself—it is natural. In contrast, a craftsman, or artisan, brings forth to presence what does not arise out of itself. For Heidegger, the craftsman brings forth out of concealment into unconcealment. This is a revealing, an un-veiling, or an un-covering, the Greek *alētheia*, truth. Bringing forth is grounded in truth as re-veil-ation, or un-covering, exposing to the light the appearance as the bringing into presence. As Heidegger points out, *technē* is linked to *epistēmē*, root of the English word epistemological (Heidegger 1977, p. 13). *Technē* is a mode of knowing. *Technē* means to understand, to be expert at something, as Aristotle describes:

“art is identical with a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning. All art is concerned with coming into being, i.e. with contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made; for art is concerned neither with things that are, or come into being, by necessity, nor with things that do so in accordance with nature (since these have their origin in themselves).” (Aristotle 1984a, VI, 4, 1140a9–15)

Genealogy is an art that makes proofs and charts based on theoretical knowledge exhibited in practice, is teachable, and whose products are neither necessary nor natural. *Technē* reveals whatever does not bring forth itself and what also does not already lie before us as a presence, or an appearance. More crucial than making is the revelation of *technē*—it reveals precisely what it brings forth. Truth happens in this realm where revealing and unconcealing take place. In this way of thinking, truth is not something stated about what was previously there, but a making happen in the bringing forth to presence that is unconcealing and revealing. The difference depends on how one conceives of what it is to be there. This introduces to genealogy a distinct view of truth, a requirement for genealogy to escape the now indefensible position of seeking to state the past exactly as it was.

This provides a new and different way of viewing genealogy. As craft, as *technē*, genealogy first needs to strive for mastery which requires theoretical knowledge and extensive experience. Second, it is a know-how that is also a means directed toward an end. The end involves ancestors, descendants, family structures, relationships, and facts about them. Third, genealogy is a bringing forth to presence from concealedness to unconcealedness. It makes truth happen in its revealing, or uncovering, through its *technē*, its technology (but not in the contemporary sense of technology).

What exactly does genealogy reveal? What does it bring forth to presence? Among other things, it unconceals a parent. A parent holds a relational position with respect to some person. That person was born, and yet that person’s birth was unremembered by that person, unexperienced, a non-event event. Birth, and one can also say conception, is one’s origin that cannot be originarily known or brought directly to self-presence (Romano 2009, p. 29). It is an impossible self-conscious bringing to presence (Hatton 2018).

Origins are beginnings as well as explanations by means of causality. The past is absent but at times may be brought to presence as spatialized or as spatio-temporalized. That kind of presencing is an encounter of self-revelation.

Bringing to presence of a parent is a tracing back by means of instrumentality to an original causation. A parent (both parents) is (are) the material, formal, and efficient cause of the conception and birth of a person, and in some cases, a telos, or an end (sometimes called the final cause) (Aristotle 1984b, II, 3, 195a4–195b30; Aristotle 1984c, V, 2, 1013a24–1013b3). The primary genealogical bringing forth is of the origin of a person, a birth as causally explained, revealed, and uncovered in the parent. This truth-making is thus of an origin, a genealogical showing of a coming to appearance of the origin parent. It thus founds the person in the bringing forth to presence not only of a relation but as the

originating parent, a father or mother or both. At one and the same time, genealogy as *technē* aims for discovery of a parent by its means (a means directed to an end) which thereby is a bringing forth, and also brings, by its revealing, an origin that springs into presence as cause, end, and truth. Genealogy thus provides both an origin and an end that is a cause of an origin. Insofar as it self-reflects and further develops and unfolds its theoretical underpinnings, it may co-deliberate with scholarship to engender and sustain a dialogue—between academia and the realm of practitioners.

6. Objection and Conclusions

One must consider an objection, viz. that Greek *technē* as art is a bringing into existence what did not previously exist, and also is not natural. Yet genealogy discovers what already existed (ancestors) and were previously brought to presence by nature (through procreation and birth). Thus, the objection is that genealogy cannot be a *technē*. In other words, Greek *technē* is most often conceived as a non-natural making of what was never there but then exists out of a creation by a craftsman. A human being arises by nature, not at the hands of a craftsman.

However, the knowledge of the ancestral human resulting from genealogical research is a re-making through epistemology, a discovery perhaps of what was there in the past but is brought to the present through research. This re-making is a making through genealogy and thus non-natural, and consequently *technē*. One can conceive of this as follows: Genealogy also brings to presence what was ontologically already brought to presence, and so ontology and epistemology for genealogy are circular—one creates what was already created and brought forth by nature. Craft contrasts with nature, but a nature that is hidden and thus calls for being un-hidden, un-concealed. It is brought to presence as truth-making, or truth-appearing.

This still remains a problem, however. *Technē* is a kind of knowing not because it knows what is, but because it knows how to produce what is not, and thus how to bring an entity into existence and to presence. *Technē* is a mode of truth not because it discloses what is or states accurately facts about something that already exists, but because it uncovers something that was concealed, and it does so as it unconceals. Put differently, *technē* makes truth happen while it makes something happen, that is, come to pass by appearing. Genealogical research finds precisely what is concealed. It is (as) concealed, but having been hidden is made to appear.

Considering more closely the relation of *technē* to knowing, and also how technology reveals, *technē* achieves and works its product-making and truth-revealing by mastering material and tools, both of which are resources, to give order to something thereby making a thing. There are two ways of looking at this. First, *technē* gives form to matter; it forms matter that is in an unformed state (relative to the produced thing) into a thing recognizable by its form as well as its material. From this perspective, *technē* uses an (already) existent to make another existent. Second, by mastering its resources, it forces order on them, particularly on the material resource in the case of a craft that results in a physical object, or on the intellectual resource in the case of a craft that results in an intellectual object. Through tools, hands, and mind, it forces material to yield to the demand and wish of the artist. In this sense, *technē* is mastery. And in this sense, genealogy is *technē*. From both perspectives, genealogy is *technē*. It is not history or a subset of history. It is not a study of kinship. It is not a study of identity. It is *technē*.

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